Myanmar military guns down 114 people in deadliest daily toll

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In a bloody crackdown on Saturday, police and troops in Myanmar shot and killed at least 114 people as protests continued across the country against the February 1 military coup that ousted the elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. According to the latest tally by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, at least 423 people have been killed since the coup.

As the junta tightens its censorship, details of what is happening in the streets of Myanmar are becoming increasingly limited. As of March 18, the last newspapers that were independent of the regime suspended publication, leaving the population dependent on online media and social media, which have also been hit by restrictions and shutdowns imposed by the junta.

In its round up of the military's violence, *Myanmar Now* confirmed that the highest number of casualties had occurred in the two largest cities—28 deaths in Yangon and 38 in Mandalay. The killings, however, extended across the country, an indication of the extent of the protest movement against the coup. The internet publication provided some details of events in Yangon's townships:

* At least four people were killed and several injured in the suburban township of Dala when troops opened fire on protesters outside a police station demanding the release of two women.

* Four people were shot and killed in Insein during a protest crackdown.

* A one-year-old baby was wounded after being shot in the eye with a rubber bullet in Yangon's Mayangone township.

In Mandalay, among those killed was a 13-year-old girl in Meikhtila who was shot in her house after security forces opened fire on residential areas. She was one of at least six children between the ages of 10 and 16 who were killed across the country on Saturday.

Dozens of deaths were reported in other towns, such as Dawei and Kawthaung in Tanintharyi region; Monywa, Sagaing and Shwebo in Sagaing region; Myingyan and Sintgaing in Mandalay; Kyaikhto in Mon State; and Pathein in Irrawaddy region.

The *Irrawaddy* provided further details of events in Yangon's Insein township, where residents set up roadblocks in the early hours of Saturday. Police and soldiers moved in and the killings began from 6 a.m. Insein residents fought back with whatever they could find—from broken bricks to slingshots, Molotov cocktails and burning piles of tires.

A nurse who was part of a local medical team told the publication that among the dead and wounded were a drinking water deliveryman and other bystanders. She denounced the military as "devils," asking: "How can a human being behave like this? I can't even find any proper words to describe their brutality."

Reports have emerged of heavy fighting between the military and various ethnic militias, predominantly in the country's north. An estimated 3,000 people fled across the border to Thailand after military jets bombed areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU) militia, killing at least three civilians.

The brutal military crackdown continued on Sunday as protests re-emerged in a number of cities and towns. Eyewitnesses reported that security forces opened fire on a funeral for a 20-year-old student in Bago near Yangon. While casualties have not been confirmed, another 12 people were killed yesterday in shootings elsewhere in Myanmar.

Saturday's killings took place as the junta celebrated Myanmar's Armed Forces Day, featuring a military parade in the capital, Naypyitaw. At the parade, junta

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leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, absurdly declared that the military would protect the people and strive for democracy.

The military has attempted to justify its seizure of power with false accusations that national elections held last November, won overwhelming by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD), were rigged. It has also claimed that young protesters are being misled by "foreign henchmen"—again without any substantiation.

It is certainly the case that the US and its allies are seeking to exploit the situation in Myanmar for their own purposes. Saturday's killings were followed by an outpouring of diplomatic protests. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted that his country was "horrified by the bloodshed perpetrated by Burmese security forces, showing that the junta will sacrifice the lives of the people to serve the few."

In a staggering display of hypocrisy, the heads of the military of the US and 11 American allies, including Australia, Canada, Japan, Germany, the United Kingdom, South Korea and New Zealand, issued a statement condemning the use of force against unarmed protesters. "A professional military follows international standards for conduct and is responsible for protecting—not harming—the people it serves," it sanctimoniously declared.

All these powers are responsible for war crimes, including the killing of civilians, in the illegal wars of aggression by US imperialism in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

The Biden administration is ramping up another "human rights" campaign in a bid to further its strategic interests in Myanmar and the broader Indo-Pacific region. The campaign is directed in particular against China and Russia, which demonstrated their support for the junta by sending representatives to Saturday's military parade.

The US has no interest in democratic rights in Myanmar, or anywhere else for that matter. Biden was vice-president in the Obama administration which brokered a rotten deal between Suu Kyi and the military to free her in 2010 and allow elections on the basis of an anti-democratic constitution. Suu Kyi effectively became the roving ambassador for a military-dominated regime, most graphically exposed by her defence of the military's atrocities against the Muslim Rohingya minority in 2017.

The Obama administration regarded the agreement as a major diplomatic achievement because Myanmar, which had been closely aligned with China, shifted its foreign policy stance toward the US. All of sudden, in Washington's propaganda, Myanmar was no longer "a rogue state" but "a developing democracy" and US relations developed on all levels—including with the country's military. Obama's intervention in Myanmar was part of his broader "pivot to Asia" against China, including preparations for war.

Now the Biden administration, as it ramps up its confrontation with China, sees the opportunity to again exert pressure, including by imposing sanctions, to fashion a regime in Naypyitaw more aligned with Washington. The US is perfectly willing to again use Suu Kyi and ignore her defence of the military's crimes against the Rohingya. Suu Kyi and her NLD represent sections of the capitalist class in Myanmar that are hostile to the military's economic domination and have oriented to the West for support.

Suu Kyi's willingness to function as apologist for the military's atrocities highlights the political weakness of the protest movement against the February 1 coup. While the protests have involved broad layers of the population, including sections of the working class, opposition leaders have limited its aims to the reinstatement of the NLD government led by Suu Kyi, which repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to sacrifice democratic rights and accommodate to the military.

A genuine struggle for democracy needs to address the pressing social issues confronting working people, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—unemployment, low wages and exploitative conditions, grinding poverty. All sections of the bourgeoisie, including those represented by the NLD, are hostile to a mass movement of the working class that begins to raise its own class demands that can be fulfilled only through the fight for a workers' and peasants' government and socialist policies.

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